

Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter

Over 80,000 equines, mostly horses unfit or unsuitable for riding, are slaughtered humanely each year in the United States. For some time, people have expressed concern about the way in which these animals are handled when transported from the auction terminal to the slaughtering facility.

Recognizing these concerns, Congress has charged the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with developing an oversight program for the transport of equines to slaughter. In response, USDA has prepared a proposed regulatory framework that addresses both the needs of equines and those of the transportation industry.

Congressional Charge

The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, commonly known as the 1996 Farm Bill, authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to issue guidelines to regulate the commercial transportation of equines to slaughter by persons regularly engaged in that activity within the United States. The Secretary is authorized to regulate the food, water, and rest provided to such equines in transit; to require the segregation of stallions from other equines during transit; and to review other related issues the Secretary considers appropriate.

The Secretary is authorized to require any person to maintain such records and reports as are deemed necessary. The Secretary also is authorized to conduct investigations and inspections and to establish and strictly enforce civil penalties.

In a final rule published on December 31, 1996, the Secretary delegated the authority for administering these requirements to USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

USDA's Initiatives

To meet the Congressional charge to improve the care of equines while they are being transported to slaughter, APHIS has undertaken the following initiatives:

1. Convened a committee composed of its own internal experts plus representatives from USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service and Food Safety and Inspection Service to develop a meaningful, yet workable, set of guidelines.

2. Participated in two meetings called by the American Horse Council and the Animal Horse Protection Association. From these meetings, USDA was able to develop a strategy for implementing a proactive program to address all provisions contained in the Congressional charge.

3. Commissioned three research projects to study requirements for food and water, position of various types of equines within a conveyance, and behavior of stallions and aggressive mares in confinement. Researchers also examined the importance of segregating various breeds and the need for rest after more than 28 hours of confinement.

4. Identified the need for an educational program and gained consensus regarding the program from the participants involved in developing and/or contributing to the proposed rule. The proposed program includes production of a training video, publication of a guidebook, and presentation of a series of educational workshops around the United States.

Overview of the Proposed Rule

The final initiative that APHIS undertook was the development of a proposed rule for the transport of equines to slaughter. Published for comment on May 19, 1999, the proposed rule calls for:

- **Adherence** to a feed and water schedule prior to shipping the equines;
- **Issuance** of USDA "backtags" to each equine in the shipment. Backtags are affixed to an animal as identification so that the animal can be traced back to its original owner;
- **Completion** of an owner/shipper certificate, including an authorized signature for each equine;
- **Compliance** with specific loading guidelines, which include allocating floor space and segregation of aggressive equines, such as stallions, from the rest of the animals;
- **Education** of personnel responsible for ensuring the care, safety, and welfare of each animal while in transit to the slaughtering facility;
- **Inspection** of animals and the transport trucks by qualified USDA authorities;

- **Enforcement** of specific requirements at the slaughtering facility by USDA officials, including inspection of the animals and the owner/shipper certificate.

How to Get a Copy of the Proposed Rule

The proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 64, No. 96, May 19, 1999. APHIS accepted comments on the rule until July 19, 1999, and is in the process of carefully reviewing all input received.

To request a copy of the rule, you may write to:
Regulatory Analysis and Development
Policy and Program Development,
APHIS
4700 River Road, Unit 118
Riverdale, MD 20737-2817

You may also visit APHIS' Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppd/rad/webrepor.html> or write or call the APHIS contacts listed below.

For additional information on this issue, contact the government/industry coordinator of the Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter program:

Timothy Cordes
National Animal Health Programs, Veterinary Services (VS), APHIS
4700 River Road, Unit 43
Riverdale, MD 20737-1231
Phone: (301) 734-4363

or

Betsy Sillers
National Animal Health Programs, VS, APHIS
4700 River Road, Unit 43
Riverdale, MD 20737-1231
Phone: (301) 734-8711

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